

# WE LEFT OUR HEARTS IN NULATO

by Shawn Strannigan

My birth certificate states that I was born in Kansas, but my husband swears Alaskan blood flows through my veins. I can't deny it. If I had the chance to travel anywhere on this planet, I would return to my beloved Great Land. No question about it. And the more I go back, the more I'm drawn specifically to the Yukon region and the Native people there.



This summer, I had the privilege of taking a team of eight people with me to the village of Nulato, an Athabaskan village situated on the Yukon. From our earliest preparations to our final “goodbyes”, this summer outreach exceeded all our expectations and greatly blessed our lives. We are already planning next year's trip—want to come along?

**Preparing for the Summer Impact** was a blast. We opened each team meeting with prayer, asking the



Lord to bless and guide us. We brainstormed freely, and frequently emailed the Joyces to get their feedback on our ideas.

“Just be flexible,” was Greg's standard reply.

We learned that our team would be staying in the small teen rec center, which came equipped with a foosball table, pool table, popcorn machine, refrigerator and a bathroom.



“Pretend that you are going camping,” Greg instructed us.

“And start praying that the toilet in the rec center is working when you get here.” That was sobering, but pray we did. And God provided! ☺



**Every outreach** has its own unique God-prints all over it, and ours was no exception. A man from my church heard about our trip and offered to ship whatever we needed into the village. *For free!*

He didn't give us a weight limit, so we kind of went crazy. We boxed up a week's worth of non-perishable food, craft supplies, sports equipment, bedding, folding chairs, a microwave, squirt guns, and duct tape. Our benefactor not only shipped all 650 lbs. at his expense, he even sent up pizza and ice cream for the village kids during that week of outreach!

**Once we arrived in Nulato**, every team member quickly found his or her niche. Whether the task was cooking or cleaning up (ever tried doing dishes in the bathroom sink?), teaching or helping with crafts, fishing or playing on the local softball team, each person served joyfully. When we finally closed up the rec center and collapsed on our cots each night (usually after midnight), we recounted the highlights of our day.

Kathy would ask for input on the next day's lesson, while Kim described her death-defying canoe trip down the Nulato River.

Brian recounted his antics on the village softball team and Brock and Jerry talked about the new friends they'd made during the day.

But Bonnie—the ever-cheerful craft lady-- Bonnie would weep.



Bonnie allowed her heart to be broken by the Lord that week. She continually lifted up the children of Nulato in prayer. She shed tears over the desperate circumstances in the village, and she wept with the hope Jesus put in her heart for each child. And she loved them all—from the smallest child to the toughest teen.

**We left in shifts** at the end of the week, three of us at a time loading our gear and climbing aboard Don Ernst's float plane.



Bonnie was on the first flight out, long before even the youngest children were awake.

When a group of youngsters finally burst into the rec center, they asked for Bonnie. “She’s already gone,” we told them. “But she’ll be back next year.” And the children cried . . .

Thankfully the Joyces are still there. They are Jesus’ hands and feet to the people of Nulato.

“We were blessed and encouraged by the team’s fellowship,” said Kim Joyce. “It was great that they came and just loved on the villagers for a whole week.”

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